

PODCAST



PODCAST 8 - DIFFERENT CULTURES, ONE TEAM: LESSONS FROM GLOBAL COLLABORATION

“WORKING IN AN INTERNATIONAL IT TEAM”

A few years later, I logged into my first morning call at work. Twelve small squares on my screen. Twelve faces from twelve different places - Finland, Portugal, India, Germany, South Korea, Poland, and more.

Same company. Different time zones. Different accents. Different coffee hours. I was the youngest on the team - a junior software tester, fresh out of studies. It sounded like a dream job. At first, it felt like an experiment in communication science. Our first meeting was... chaotic. When someone said, “I’ll finish it soon,” no one knew what soon meant. When the project manager said, “We’ll discuss it later,” our colleagues in India thought “later” meant today. The Finnish team thought it meant next week. We were all speaking English - and somehow, we still weren’t speaking the same language.

At first, I blamed technology. Time zones. Internet connections. But soon I realised the real challenge was deeper. It wasn’t what we were saying - it was how we were understanding each other.

Our Finnish colleague, Mika, spoke very little during meetings. I assumed he wasn’t interested. Until one day, he sent me a private message - a detailed analysis of our

entire testing process, with suggestions that improved our workflow overnight. That's when I learned: silence can mean reflection, not disengagement.

Then there was Sofia from Portugal - warm, expressive, full of energy. She often interrupts during meetings. At first, it felt overwhelming. Later, I understood: for her, interruptions weren't rudeness - they were enthusiasm.

Working in that team taught me something no technical training ever did. Communication isn't about efficiency. It's about connection. The more I listened, the more I learned to translate between cultures - not words, but meanings. I noticed small things: how emails begin, how feedback is given, how "maybe" can mean very different things in different cultures.

During one stressful sprint, we faced a tight deadline. I had an idea for a new approach to testing automation. Normally, I would've stayed quiet. But I remembered the lessons I'd learned - from Erasmus, from teamwork, from listening. So I spoke up. The silence that followed felt endless. Then, one by one, people started building on the idea, improving it and shaping it. We implemented the plan. It saved us two full days of work.

That day, I understood something clearly: Belonging in an international team isn't about perfect English or knowing all the jargon. It's about daring to contribute your perspective and trusting that diversity makes results stronger.

Today, when new colleagues join our team, I recognise the confusion in their eyes. And I always tell them one thing: Don't aim to be the smartest in the room. Aim to be the one who listens best because global teamwork isn't about eliminating differences. It's about using them. Differences don't divide us. They shape our creativity. They push us to find better solutions.



When I look back now, I still remember that hesitation - the moment when I almost said nothing. I've learned that being neutral in the face of hate is also a choice. And it's a choice that supports the wrong side. Once I understood that, staying silent was no longer an option.

So when I see hate online today, I remind myself of this: Speaking up isn't just about defending someone else. It's about protecting the kind of world I want to live in. A world where people are brave enough to care. And kind enough to speak - even when it's not easy.

Call to Action – Listen Globally, Act Locally

In your next group project, online class, or international conversation:

- Pause before you speak.
- Listen before you reply.
- Ask before you assume.

Try this:

During your next group discussion, write down one thing you learned from someone who thinks differently from you. Reflect on how it changes your perspective because intercultural readiness doesn't start in programs or meetings. It begins in everyday choices.

And every time you choose curiosity over judgment, you make global cooperation not just possible - but meaningful.

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